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STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

PREPARING FOR CHINA IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

BY

BRIAN M. SIMMONS

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Brian M. Simmons

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ABSTRACT

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With China's emergence in the next century as a world economic and military power, it is imperative that the United States continue an engagement approach to assist with China's continued development and to shape her behavior as a member of the international community in a manner commensurate with world leader status. This paper reviews current U.S.- China policies, U.S. national interests within Eastern Asia, potential areas for discord, and identifies specific shaping initiatives to reduce the likelihood of armed conflict in the future. Further, this paper elaborates why an engagement policy vice a containment policy for China is essential to maintain military and economic stability in the Asian-Pacific region of the world.

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Within the next decade or two, there will be a billion Chinese on the mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude toward the rest of Asia will be...We believe that the free nations of Asia must brace themselves, get themselves with secure, progressive, stable institutions of their own...We would hope that in China there would emerge a generation of leadership that would think seriously about what is called "peaceful coexistence"....

—Secretary of State Dean Rusk, November 1967¹

Thirty-one years ago, U.S. policies and goals for China and East Asia were remarkably similar to those expressed today within our National Security Strategy. As was projected, China has emerged as a regional military power. The recent growth in military as well as economic power is demonstration of her commitment to achieve recognition as a successful, modern and independent nation. This growth may also foretell China's plans to again rise to the level of world prominence enjoyed for centuries prior to the 1800s. In another decade or two, there is little doubt that China's continued military growth and economic prosperity will propel her to world leader status.

Accordingly, it is prudent for the U.S. to identify our national interests in East Asia and to initiate actions to ensure their security. Given China's steady military and economic progress, and the potential to become a threat to U.S. interests, engagement is now required to impact China's future actions in establishing a more cooperative relationship with her Asian

neighbors. It is in the best interests of the U.S. to assist China in becoming a "responsible member of the international community", ² militarily and economically, and to ensure "peace, prosperity and stability endure in Asia and around the world". ³

This paper reviews the U.S. National Security Strategy for China, Sino-U.S. strategic interests and associated security challenges, and specific military initiatives for shaping today's environment to lessen the risk of armed conflict in tomorrow's.

U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS)

China is in the forefront of U.S. security interests; the October 1997 visit by President Jiang Zemin to the White House is a notable point to support this as is President Clinton's planned summit in Beijing in June 1998. Underlying U.S. security policy for engagement with China is the premise that "democratic governments are more likely to cooperate with each other against common threats and to encourage free and open trade and economic development - and less likely to wage war or abuse the rights of their people. The trend towards democracy and free markets throughout the world advances American interests." This quote from the May 1997 NSS implies that the long term policy goals for China have optimistically been developed with the intent to

transform the current government into a more democratic form.

This is a very tall order considering that today's Chinese government is decidedly non-democratic.

In balancing defense and economic policies, the U.S. will use an engagement strategy with China employing shaping initiatives to advance national strategic interests. These initiatives are a subset of the integrated shape, respond and prepare now approaches supporting the NSS objectives. The NSS advises that effective shaping is a preventative measure that minimizes the need to respond and prepare for other actions. Given the decreasing resources available to procure weapons and pay for military operations (required to respond and prepare), shaping tools are becoming increasingly important and, when successful, are easily the most cost effective. Shaping initiatives may have their greatest payoff in maintaining stability in East Asia as China's military growth parallels her economic growth and regional tensions are mounting regarding the uncertainty of China's long range intentions.

U.S. Strategic Interests

1. Geography - In terms of geography, China is situated about as far away from the U.S. as is possible. However, the strategic

importance of East Asia as a whole requires, and will continue to require, a substantial annual commitment of U.S. military resources to defend our interests in this region. As the world's third largest country⁶ and the largest in the Pacific rim, China's extensive shoreline touches the Yellow, East and South China Seas and her vast resources make China a potential economic center for the world.

The value of owning these resources and coastal areas is noteworthy in China's history. Within the last 100 years, France, Germany, England, Japan, and Russia forcibly occupied Chinese territory and established outposts to secure their. trading interests and to exploit her resources. The strategic importance of controlling these assets is compelling; especially considering the possibility of military control of the Chinese coast in addition to controlling other key landforms in the region such as Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, and the many other large and small islands which separate the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This importance was clearly recognized by the Japanese during World War II. Should a regional power exert military control over these areas today, it could also impose economic controls on all resources being shipped into or out of East Asia. This scenario, with China as the potential regional hegemon, is a key reason why maintaining stability in East Asia is a vital U.S. interest.

2. Economics - Economic growth for China is estimated to continue at 8-10% per year until the year 2000 at which time China's output will approach \$10 trillion making it the fastest growing in the world. Already the world's fourth largest economy, China is the U.S.' fifth largest trading partner (at approximately \$59 billion per year and the fastest growing market for U.S. goods and services. China follows only the U.S. in annual receipt of foreign investments. As a more balanced and bilateral trading relationship becomes established, reduction of the current trade deficit with China (approximately \$40 billion per year year) will result in greater exports of U.S. goods.

Currently more than 170,000 U.S. jobs depend on exports to China. These numbers are expected to increase given that China is home to 1.2 billion people, almost one-quarter of the world's population--"a vast pool of potential consumers for U.S. products and services". It is important to point out however, that the U.S. job market has also been negatively impacted by China's low wage workforce. Production jobs lost likely do not offset the 170,000 now producing exports to China and balance here only occurs as trade levels balance. Chinese workers, given their low salaries, do not appear to be the sole solution to buying more U.S. exports. China has obtained a decided advantage in trade

issues with the U.S. and has used this to boost economic performance. Perhaps it is unsound economic policy, but the reality is that the U.S. has become reliant upon high quality, low-priced goods produced in China (as well as Japan and Taiwan) and our dependency on East Asia to maintain our current economy and standard of living is already evident.

A point highlighting the strategic importance of China's economy is the demonstrated linkage between economic growth and political democratization. Optimistically, U.S. support of China's economic growth will yield similar results as in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea where U.S. supported economic reforms, industrialization, and trade-fostered growth resulted in the established governments becoming increasingly democratic. 13 Admittedly, the terms which brought these other nations to adopt democracy were quite different however, it has been suggested that "economic developments on the Chinese mainland have created the circumstances in which the Communist Party of China no longer commands the unqualified allegiance of the citizens of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), more concerned now with improving their material life circumstances". 14 While it is unlikely that China's communist government will be peacefully converted to democracy based on economic growth, in this post-Mao era the timing appears optimum for continuation of current U.S.

policies which enhance economic growth on the outside chance that China follows the pattern exhibited by her Asian neighbors.

As a practical example of the importance of supporting
China's economic prosperity, consider that President Clinton in
1994 re-established China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status as a
U.S. trading partner thereby delinking MFN status with human
rights. This had been revoked by President Clinton five years
earlier based on objections to human rights violations
highlighted by the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators at
Tiananmen Square. This example shows the U.S. policy priority of
supporting China's growing economy; perhaps even higher priority
than desired improvements in human rights.

- 3. Regional Stability Continued economic growth in China and East Asia is directly linked to continued peace and regional stability. Protecting this stability is a vital U.S. economic and military interest. The major issues which could lead to regional instability and currently require U.S. military strategic planning follow:
 - A. The Rise of China as a Military Power -

The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. Given China's progressive and independent history for centuries preceding the 1840's, and the subsequent 100 year domination by aggressors, it is easy to understand today's sentiment within China to seek a leadership role in world events and to be ideologically independent from the western nations. There is concern among China's neighbors however that the above words from Mao reflect contemporary Chinese thinking and that future regional disputes will be resolved militarily. It is true that today's Chinese leadership believes that the "key to great power status is to build a world-class economy and military". 17

At present, China is without a regional military peer and poses the largest and most determined threat to its neighbors. 18 An increasing economy has allowed increases in defense spending to \$8 billion in 1996 based on official Chinese budgetary data. 19 Because China provides few details about how its defense funding is spent, it is recognized that actual defense expenditures well exceed the \$8 billion figure. In fact, outside estimates put this figure more accurately in the range of \$20-25 billion. 20

During the last decade, China has reduced its active armed forces by 1 million personnel, 21 developed doctrine for high-

technology warfare, and emphasized procurement and fielding of high technology weapons. While China's defense expenditures are increasing, and it is hard to compare China's expenditures with U.S. defense expenditures, the upper bound estimate for China's defense is less than 10 percent of the \$260 billion appropriated for the U.S. military this fiscal year. As a result of this difference, "China's military capabilities will not approach the level of a world-class power until some time in the twentieth first century". 22

Within East Asia however, China does have a large defense budget and the weaponry being purchasing provides improved force projection capabilities. This is significant given China has recently made claims to islands within the South China Sea that may have to be defended militarily at some distance from the mainland. Major weapons system acquisitions from Russian suppliers recently included 3 submarines, 27 combat aircraft, 28 helicopters and 6 battle tanks illustrating this point. Attempts are now underway to procure an aircraft carrier. 23

It is clear that China's military focus is shifting from a historical defensive style of attrition warfare to a smaller (yet still the world's largest), rapidly deployed, increasingly offensive and more lethal force. Worth noting is that a small, high-technology capability within China's large military provides the leverage to strike the most capable assets of an adversary

first yet still provide a secondary, lesser sophisticated capability in reserve that can overwhelm a subdued opponent with sheer numbers under arms. This is a plausible scenario should China resort to force in defending her new territorial claims which will intensify over time as the trend towards a higher-technology force continues.

It is not to be overlooked that "China possesses the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, including 80-plus intermediaterange ballistic missiles and 20-plus intercontinental missiles". In addition, "the Chinese Air Force operates approximately 180 aircraft capable of dropping nuclear bombs and the Navy has one nuclear-armed submarine". China has declared a no first-use nuclear policy although the capability to wage war by asymmetric means clearly exists.

B. East Asia Arms Buildup - "Since the end of the Cold War, defense spending has declined dramatically around the globe--except in Asia". Growth in arms purchases can be tied to the maturing of regional governments established after World War II and as an unintended consequence of economic growth. Another reason for East Asian increases in defense spending is to maintain the current regional balance of power given that China's

military growth is predominantly offensive in nature and increased defenses are now required.

Prior to the end of the Cold War, there was regional reliance on the U.S. to provide needed military assistance.

While a U.S. commitment to maintain regional stability still exists, the decreased military presence has reduced confidence among East Asian nations regarding how long this presence will continue, and of the level of this commitment to providing military support if and when needed. This feeling of insecurity has also contributed to the arms buildup in East Asia.

C. China's Recent Territorial Claims - In 1992, China passed the Law in the Territorial Waters and Contiguous Areas of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). This legislation claims that the major islands and waterways within the South and East China Seas are "inalienable constituents of the sovereign territory of the PRC". This legislation extends Chinese sovereignty over "some 800,000 square kilometers of the waters of the West Pacific, from north of Taiwan to the full extent of the Malaysian littoral". China has shown its willingness to use military force to enforce these claims when it seized the Paracels in 1974, when it occupied the Spratlys in 1988 and 1992, and when it occupied Mischief Reef in 1995. As a demonstration

of military resolve, the Chinese Navy patrols these areas today and there have been numerous incidents of official Chinese vessels interfering with the passage of merchant ships within these waters.³³

China has used these territorial acquisitions to test the limits of her control over the neighboring countries and shared waterways. There is not sufficient military power organic to any East Asian country to prevent this from having occurred or to forcibly remove her presence at this time. This has underscored regional tension regarding China's military growth and future intentions.

A presumed motive for these territorial acquisitions is that China's resources are diminishing at the same time population is rapidly growing. China has "22% of the world's population living on 7% of the world's arable land". A secure claim to the South China Sea would result in the promise of extensive fish harvests and oil reserves. More importantly, control over the major waterways puts leverage over Japan, South Korea and the other East Asian countries that rely heavily on importing raw materials to produce goods and subsequently export these products to western markets. Shipping would then necessarily go through the island chokepoints now claimed by China. "If the PRC is permitted to control traffic in the international waters of the

East and South China Seas, the continued economic development of all the nations in the region would become, at least in part, hostage to the goodwill of Beijing."³⁶

D. Taiwan - Taiwan leadership recently pressed the international community to recognize its independence from mainland China.³⁷ This action rekindled the official Chinese position of "one China" and China has claimed it will use force to ensure Taiwan does not become independent.³⁸ Current U.S. policy recognizes that there is only one China, Taiwan is a part of it, and that the U.S. supports the peaceful resolution between China and Taiwan.³⁹ However, the U.S. has recognized that Taiwan cannot defend itself against a Chinese invasion and, in 1979, passed the Taiwan Relations Act which stipulated "that the peace and security of the Western Pacific were in the interests of the U.S." and that the U.S. would "provide for arms sales to Taiwan, and Congress and the president would determine the types and quantities of defensive arms and services to be provided".⁴¹

China has flexed her military muscles on separate occasions with military exercises, missile tests and live fire exercises within the Taiwan Straits to tone down the Taiwanese pleas to the international community for recognition of independence and, most recently, to influence upcoming elections. The U.S. reacted to the most recent live fire exercises by dispatching naval

vessels⁴³ to reduce tensions in the area and to signal continued support to the defense commitments within the Taiwan Relations Act.

Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) -China formally agreed to stop transporting weapons of mass destruction to other nations when it joined the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in the late 1980's. 44 Since joining however, there have been claims by western intelligence agencies that Chinese nuclear and missile technology was transferred to third world countries in violation of the NPT or skirting the edge of existing agreements. Of particular concern to the U.S. was that recipients of this technology included Middle Eastern and North African countries as well as Pakistan. 45 In March 1998, China was accused of negotiating with Iran to provide hundreds of tons of material used in enriching uranium to weapons grade. 46 This is remarkable in that this accusation comes only weeks after China pledged to halt assistance to Iran's nuclear program. element of international distrust clearly exists regarding China's willingness to abide by WMD arms control agreements.

U.S. Military Shaping Initiatives for China

1. Security Relationships and Forward Presence - One of the strongest deterrents to future Chinese aggression is the visible presence of the U.S. military. Since World War II, a strong U.S. military presence and alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand have "been essential to maintaining the stability that has enabled most nations in the Asia Pacific region to build thriving economies for the benefit of all".47 With the U.S. military presence reducing to approximately 100,000 personnel48, continuation of these relationships is crucial. The amount of U.S. military forces deployed to the Asia-Pacific region now approximates that deployed to Europe reflecting the increased priority of our interests in this theater after the end of the Cold War. 49 remaining U.S. presence, in addition to the forces allied with Japan and South Korea, must remain visible and substantial in both manpower levels and equipment to prevent any aspirations by the Chinese to become a regional hegemon. "Regular deployments through the area, bilateral exercises, and port visits provide demonstrations of American engagement in Asia and enhance regional stability. An American withdrawal would have the opposite effect."50

The U.S. and Japan have reaffirmed a bilateral security relationship for the express purpose of "achieving common

security objectives and maintaining a stable and prosperous environment". Similarly, the U.S. has committed over the next four years to maintain solidarity with South Korea to ensure "a struggling North Korea does not opt for a military solution to its problems". These alliances, plus continued alliances with the Philippines and Australia, and continued forward presence provide a clear signal to China that U.S. vital interests in East Asia will be defended by force if necessary.

While not currently under study, it appears prudent for the U.S. to also team militarily with other industrial nations who use the Pacific rim sea lines of communication as avenues for shipping. These nations would suffer economically should China control the waterways and restrict trade access. This could include the major European trading partners, Russia, the Americas, and other Asian nations. The U.S. is clearly not alone in having vital economic interests in this region of the world and should receive additional securities from the others who share the benefits of unrestricted access within the region.

2. Participation in Regional Forums - The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) is comprised of China's neighbors with the primary goal of maintaining regional stability. ASEAN and the ARF consider advice from dialogue partners and other nations with substantial economic or other

interests within the region to include the U.S. and China.⁵³ The current focus is on avoiding armed conflict with China as this is recognized to be counter to regional stability and long term economic progress.⁵⁴ However, recent territorial acquisitions have heightened tensions among participants as has China's rapid military growth. "A decision to use any measure other than diplomacy toward China is beyond the capacity of the collective ASEAN membership."⁵⁵ This fact means that Chinese aggression could only be repulsed today given military intervention by a non-ARF participant. This, in turn, implies that the ARF should be expanded to include a collective military capability that could deter further Chinese acts of aggression.

3. Transparency - Transparency agreements require countries to periodically itemize military personnel, equipment, deployment plans, unusual activities, and budgets to bolster confidence among neighboring nations by publicly declaring their military resources and intentions. The ARF provides one framework for sharing this information. It is unlikely that China will willingly "open her books" to the public as demonstrated by the apparently low estimate of defense expenditures officially reported. However, collective pressure from ARF participants may have a positive effect over time by presenting a united front to China that leads to increased confidence and decreased likelihood that misreading military events will escalate to war. As a

caution however, transparency and other CBMs only work as long as both sides do not want war. The U.S. and the ARF should continue to push for increased transparency of China's military program.

4. Military to Military Relationships - Selective relationships between the U.S. and Chinese military can be established to develop "personal and institutional networks which can foster understanding and evolve into informal structures for cooperation and collaboration". 56 These would be quite different from the military to military relationships that the U.S. has in place with friendly and allied countries. These relationships would not be for professional education opportunities or for any purpose that would improve the Chinese military capabilities. 57 Instead, the goal would be to open the door for informal exchanges to reduce suspicions and affect perceptions that they have of us and vice versa.

As an example, in March 1997, three Chinese Navy ships visited the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor for a four day visit. This was after the ships had stopped at San Diego, Mexico, Peru, and Chile. During the stopover, there was substantial opportunity for socialization among the sailors of both nations. A small step perhaps, but this initiative will result in some favorable comments regarding the U.S. reaching others within the Chinese military. It is noted that U.S. Pacific Command is probably in

the best position, and has begun, to conduct military to military relationships with China. More effort towards developing these relationships is warranted.

- 5. Arms Sales It is probable that the U.S. will sell weapons to China. 60 A tenet of a successful security cooperation program often means that arms sales between the parties exist to a preset level of capability. In the case of selling U.S. arms to China, it has been proposed that these sales be limited to "clearly defensive systems which would not directly contribute to force projection capabilities. Moreover, the U.S. should not authorize the Peoples Liberation Army to buy weapons which it might use against Chinese citizens" keeping the pressure on China regarding human rights. 61 These arms sales are unlikely to be more than a cooperative gesture given China's relatively small weapons acquisition budget available and visible unwillingness to rely on foreign weapons manufacturers.
- 6. Nuclear Arms Control China is the only country that possesses nuclear weapons within East Asia. China is modernizing her nuclear strategic strike capability but at a slow pace recognizing that rapid growth could lead to a regional nuclear arms race. The U.S., as a member with China of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Missile Technology Control

Regime, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has numerous opportunities to discuss China's nuclear weapons program and should actively use these forums to address limiting nuclear capabilities within East Asia.

7. Signaling - What is missing in today's interactions with China is a clear message on what will be tolerated and what will not be. China has adopted a strategy of making small incremental gains in territory acquisition, in trading imbalances, and in acts of military aggression and has been largely successful because the U.S. and East Asian nations have not articulated exactly what China can and cannot do and what the repercussions will be. In this nebulous environment, China is emboldened and will only incur the wrath of its neighbors after exceeding a hypothetical tolerance threshold. This is the opposite from what the strategy should be. It is recommended that the ASEAN partners and the U.S. identify what actions will be taken to militarily contain China given specific future acts of aggression. The goal here should be to prevent an international incident, not respond militarily after the fact.

Conclusions

The U.S. engagement strategy for China optimistically relies on the assumption that a more democratic form of government will

evolve over time. While this has worked elsewhere in East Asia, this end appears unlikely with the firmly entrenched communist regime in China. This seems especially true given China's ideology and aspirations to rise to world leader status on her own accord. Recent economic growth, at world record pace, have demonstrated that non-democratic regimes do not always result in bankrupt economies.

There is a counter to the engagement strategy which would contain China's growth in order to preserve the current U.S. status as the most powerful influence within East Asia and restrict China to its present relative level of regional and global influence. This approach views a belligerent China as an imminent threat to American vital interests and views the Chinese military buildup and territorial claims as proof of hegemonic plans. The question remaining is "why should we continue an engagement policy with China?"

Both engagement and containment strategies recognize the emergence of China economically and militarily in the twenty-first century and seek to protect U.S. strategic interests. Both strategies also recognize that China will grow regardless of U.S. support or hindrance, and realize that shaping China's behavior at this time is prudent. The key difference lies in the approaches used to maintain stability in East Asia; engagement

seeks to "team" with China to constructively shape her behavior vice containment which subordinates China's actions to those which support U.S. interests.

Both strategies could work, both could fail, and the reality of our ability to project Chinese intent is not impressive.

However, the engagement strategy expressed in the current NSS appears to have the greatest probability of success because:

- 1. Today's relative startpoint of Chinese military capabilities versus regional military capabilities (including the U.S. capabilities and alliances) is extremely one-sided and even the projected growth in China's capabilities do not change this imbalance for the foreseeable future. Simply put, the conventional fighting capability of the Chinese military has vast improvements to make before it can engage a regional force allied with the U.S. Further, the amount of money currently dedicated to China's weapons modernization program remains modest compared to U.S. investments adding to this imbalance.
- 2. There are numerous examples of U.S. policy interactions with China that have been largely one-sided towards our interests.

 From the Unequal Treaties in the mid 1800's, to the strategic alignment with China as a convenient counterweight to Russia in

the Cold War, to today's human rights debates. It is no surprise that China looks at the U.S. today without complete trust.

Conversely, China has seemed at times to prefer a world without a single superpower and has attempted to erode U.S. military status by broadening the number of rogue nations as potential U.S. adversaries. If China had continued to spread WMD technologies, U.S. military forces certainly would be projected more globally than as currently stationed between the European and Asian theaters. The trust factor between the U.S. and China is still low and will only improve over time via continued diplomacy, CBMs, and mutually beneficial economic efforts. These initiatives are only feasible in an engagement strategy. A containment strategy would sustain the current low trust levels and perpetuate U.S. strategic planning for China as an economic and military threat.

3. An effective engagement strategy that can bolster U.S.Chinese relations in the near term will pay dividends later as
issues regarding Taiwan independence, territorial disputes,
resolution of the Korean peninsula, balancing trade, and
continued economic and military regional growth increase in
importance. Without having developed a process to build trust
and facilitate discussion, reactions by the U.S., China, and

other East Asian nations to disputes may likely employ the use of force as a first resort.

Alternatively, having cultivated a more cooperative relationship with China, resolution of disputes may begin with discussions prior to any military action. First and foremost, the U.S. goal must be to maintain stability in East Asia to protect our economic and military vital interests. While supporting partnerships such as ASEAN and the ARF are one method to achieve this, without China as a willing partner there is no guarantee that armed conflict will be avoided. Accordingly, our alliances must remain strong and our presence must not be overly diminished. Only by implementing an engagement strategy and using shaping initiatives as discussed herein, can the U.S. positively impact China's future cooperation with the international community and decrease the probability of military conflict. (5131)

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